DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 276 944 CG 019 561

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TITLE The Residential Moves by the Elderly to U.S. Central Cities, Suburbs, and Rural Areas.
PUB DATE 21 Nov 86
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Gerontological Society (39th, Chicago, IL, November 19-23, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; Age Differences; *Migration Patterns; *Older Adults; Place of Residence; Population Trends; *Relocation; Residential Patterns; *Rural to Urban Migration; *Urban to Rural Migration; *Urban to Suburban Migration

ABSTRACT

An increasing number of studies have examined the movement patterns of older people between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas in the United States. Most of these studies, however, have not considered whether the relocation patterns of older persons differ systematically from those of younger populations. The 1975-1980 migration stream and net migration patterns of over and under age 65 persons were examined using data from the 1980 U.S. Census. Central cities and suburbs of metropolitan areas (SMSAs) and nonmetropolitan areas (NonSMSAs) were distinguished as origins and destinations. The findings revealed that most elderly movers relocated within a fairly limited geographic context and revealed strong preferences for metropolitan living. Suburban locations were more favored than central city locations. Net migration findings may provide misleading interpretations of older movers' locational choices. The migration patterns of the age 65 plus population were similar to those of the age 45 to 64 population, but differed from those of the more youthful U.S. populations. The findings highlight migration streams of elderly movers who have likely experienced changes in their life-styles or personal resources. (Author/NB)

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THE RESIDENTIAL MOVES BY THE ELDERLY TO U.S. CENTRAL CITIES, SUBURBS, AND RURAL AREAS

Stephen M. Golant, Ph.D.

Paper delivered at the 39th Annual Meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, November 21, 1986

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ABSTRACT

The 1975-1980 migration stream and net migration patterns of over and under age 65 persons were examined using data from the 1980 U.S. Census. Central cities and suburbs of metropolitan areas (SMSAs) and nonmetropolitan areas (NonSMSAs) were distinguished as origins and destinations. Most elderly movers relocated within a fairly limited geographic context and revealed strong preferences for metropolitan living. Suburban locations were more favored than central city locations. Net migration findings may provide misleading interpretations of older movers' locational choices. The migration patterns of the age 65 plus population were similar to the age 45 to 64 population, but differed from those of the more youthful U.S. populations. The findings highlight migration streams of elderly movers who have likely experienced changes in their life-styles or personal resources.

Key Words: Migration patterns, Life cycle, Residential mobility, Age differences, Metropolitan/nonmetropolitan locations

THE RESIDENTIAL MOVES BY THE ELDERLY TO U.S. CENTRAL CITIES, SUBURBS, AND RURAL AREAS[1]

Stephen M. Golant, Ph.D.[2]

An increasing number of studies have examined the movement patterns of older people between U.S. metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas (Fuguitt, 1985). These have documented nonmetropolitan areas' net migration gains of elderly persons and the increased importance of migration as a component of elderly population growth (Fuguitt & Tordella, 1980; Lichter et al., 1981). The elderly persons who moved from metropolitan to nonmetropolitan areas between 1965 and 1970 have been identified as the forerunners of the well-studied and well-publicized 1970s U.S. nonmetropolitan population growth turnaround (Fuguitt & Tordella, 1980; Longino et al., 1984). Longino and his colleagues also have confirmed that this turnaround was dominated by elderly interstate movers who relocated between states rather than by elderly persons who moved within their same states. These patterns have largely continued through 1980. The most recent analysis of post-1980 census data suggests that the population tide may be turning again--metropolitan areas appear to be growing faster than nonmetropolitan areas (Forstall & Engels, 1986).

The research to date, however, still leaves several types of issues unclear. Lacking are clear baseline findings on how the migration behavior of older people living in metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas differ. For example, are urban elderly populations more likely to move than rural elderly populations, and if so, do they relocate to other similar urban places or to the very different settings of rural America? Unavailable also is information about the residential locations selected by older people who have recently moved to the United States after living in a foreign country. Despite their substantial

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numbers, little is known about the residential adjustments of this group.

Few studies have considered whether city or suburban locations are most favored by the elderly who move. This is because most researchers have treated the metropolitan area as a homogeneous geographic unit. It is implicitly assumed that elderly populations who move from one metropolitan area to another are not changing the qualities of their geographic settings. Yet these moves may involve residential shifts from the central city of one metropolitan area to the suburbs of another. Similarly, suburbs-to-central city moves may occur within the very same metropolitan area (intrametropolitan moves), motivated by the greater number and variety of social services found in the central city. Moves by older people from rural areas to central cities also cannot be identified when the metropolitan area is geographically undifferentiated.

It is true that residential moves by older people are unlikely to be a major determinant of a place's population growth or decline (Golant, 1979; Lichter et al., 1981). These moves do represent, however, one indicator of the environmental adaptations made by older people seeking places to live that are more consistent with their life-styles and personal resources. They also suggest the challenges that may be confronted by a community's social, economic, and political institutions trying to satisfy the housing and service needs of their new elderly residents (Bryant & El-Attar, 1984).

More generally, metropolitan-nonmetropolitan migration stream studies have not considered whether the relocation patterns of older persons differ systematically from those of younger populations. For example, it is unclear whether relocating elderly rural populations have as strong a preference for city living as younger rural populations or whether the central city elderly are more attracted to the suburbs than their younger counterparts? Thus few benchmarks are available against which to assess the significance of older people's urban-rural/city-suburban moving patterns.

Finally, we are sometimes unable to adequately reconcile the findings of migration stream analyses (such as by Longino and his colleagues) with those of net migration analyses (such as by Fuguitt and his colleagues). For example, on the one hand, it is found that "continuous metropolitanization of elderly migration [has occurred] during the past three census migration periods" (Longino et al., 1984, p. 723). On the other hand, we are informed that over the past two decades, nonmetropolitan areas have experienced net migration gains of elderly people (Fuguitt & Tordella, 1980). Analyses that illustrate how both sets of findings may be accurate are obviously important if correct generalizations are to be made about elderly people's residential relocation behavior.

This paper seeks to clarify the above issues by analyzing the incidence of residential moves to U.S. central cities, suburbs, and nonmetropolitan areas during the period 1975 to 1980 by both older and younger populations living inside and outside the United States. The migration data available for this period have the advantage of being collected from a large decennial U.S. census sample (U.S. Census, 1984) that allows an examination of both origin-destination migration stream and net migration patterns.

METHODS

Mobility status and origin-destination information were derived from questions asked in 1980 of a 16.7% sample (except in governmental jurisdictions under 2,500 inhabitants where the sampling rate was 50%) of persons living in the United States. These decennial census data differed from comparable tabulations reported in the Current Population Survey (CPS) because they included persons in institutions and members of the armed forces living on post in group quarters or barracks. Furthermore, because of the much larger sample size of the decennial census data, sampling errors were much smaller.

Persons categorized as "movers" reported a different address in 1980 than

five years earlier in April, 1975. This represents a conservative estimate of the volume of mobility since it excludes multiple and return moves within the five year period, the moves of persons to places outside the United States, and the moves of persons who die within the period (Tucker, 1976).

The following 1975 and 1980 origin-destination place categories were distinguished for movers: central cities and suburbs (or balances) of metropolitan areas (SMSAs) and nonmetropolitan areas (NonSMSAs). The interpretative limitations of these U.S. Census defined places are well-documented (Longino et al., 1984). Persons who lived outside the United States in 1975 (in a foreign country, Puerto Rico, or an outlying area of the United States such as American Samoa, Guam, Virgin Islands, Northern Mariana Islands) were classified as being from "abroad".

To account for the impact of in-migrants from abroad, an "adjusted" net migration gain or loss category was defined. However, because there is no simple way of estimating the number of emigrants from U.S. metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas, this measure is necessarily incomplete. As a general guide, between 1975 and 1979 the ratio of foreign immigration to emigration was estimated to be about 4 to 1 (Warren and Kraly, 1985).

To describe the absolute and relative sizes of the migration streams to and from metropolitan (and their central city and suburban components) and nonmetropolitan areas and the amount and rate of net migration, all movers were reallocated back to their 1975 origins. Thus, all measures of migration flows and rates were related to either the total number of movers originating from metropolitan or nonmetropolitan places in 1975 or to these places' 1975 populations (movers plus nonmovers).

The specification of age categories was constrained by the U.S. Census data source. It would have been desirable to distinguish detailed subgroupings of the over age 65 and older population, but this was not possible. Persons aged

5 to 19 were not separately analyzed because their mobility patterns would largely mimic those of their parents--in the already specified age group, 25 to 44.

RESULTS

Locational variability in mobility of elderly--The older population with the highest 1975-1980 mobility rate lived in central cities (26.5%). Lower mobility rates were displayed by both the suburban (21.1%) and nonmetropolitan elderly populations (20.2%).

Table 1 about here

Destinations of metropolitan elderly movers.--The majority of metropolitan elderly movers relocated within their same metropolitan area (66.9%). This was more true for central city elderly movers (70.1%) than suburban elderly movers (63.2%) (Table 2).

Only a small percentage (9.7%) of metropolitan elderly movers relocated to nonmetropolitan areas, although these rural destinations were more favored by suburban than by central city elderly movers (11.6% vs. 8.1%) (Table 2).

Destinations of nonmetropolitan elderly movers.--Almost 61% of nonmetropolitan elderly movers relocated to destinations within their same county. Another 18% moved to a different county but still opted for nonmetropolitan living. Over a fifth of nonmetropolitan elderly movers (21.0%) relocated to metropolitan areas (Table 3).

Tables 2 and 3 about here

Metropolitan/nonmetropolitan net gains and losses of elderly movers.--Metropolitan areas lost about 107,000 elderly persons as a result of their migration exchanges with nonmetropolitan areas (Table 4). The population impact of this loss was small, however (as indicated by SMSA net migration rate of 0.6). In contrast, the corresponding net gains of elderly movers by

nonmetropolitan areas had a somewhat greater impact (net migration rate of 1.4) because of the smaller size of the nonmetropolitan elderly population.

If one takes into account the number of elderly in-migrants from abroad (who predominantly moved to metropolitan destinations), then the net loss of elderly movers by metropolitan areas shrinks to just over 4,000.

Table 4 about here

Central city and suburban destinations of elderly movers.--Older people moving from one metropolitan area to another predominantly chose to live in suburban (70.5%) rather than central city locations (29.5%). This was more true for elderly persons moving from metropolitan suburbs (74.2%) than for those moving from metropolitan central cities (66.7%) (Table 5). The majority of elderly movers from nonmetropolitan areas also selected the suburbs to live (65.5%). The major exception to this suburban bias was exemplified by elderly movers from abroad, who predominantly settled in the central cities of metropolitan areas (54.3%).

Intrametropolitan moves by the elderly also exhibited a strong suburban bias. The flow of elderly persons from the central city to the suburbs was about three times the size of the flow of elderly persons from the suburbs to the central city. Separate analyses (not shown in Table 5) of the central city and suburban elderly populations' moving behavior provided a somewhat different perspective. These revealed that 27.3% of elderly central city movers relocated to the suburbs (73.7% within central cities), while 22.0% of elderly suburban movers relocated to the central city (78.0% within suburbs).

Central city/suburban net migration gains and losses.--Primarily as a result of their population exchanges with the suburbs (-481,207) and to a smaller extent with nonmetropolitan areas (-76,976), central cities lost a large number (-558,183) of elderly people. Furthermore, this loss had a relatively large population impact (net migration rate of 6.4) (Table 4). These losses were

primarily responsible for the overall losses of elderly people from metropolitan areas. In contrast, the suburbs of metropolitan areas experienced large absolute (+451,248) and relative (4.7) net migration gains of elderly persons. Only in its exchanges with nonmetropolitan areas did the suburbs lose small numbers (-29,959) of elderly persons.

Table 5 about here

Elderly and nonelderly moving patterns compared.--The elderly were less likely to move than the population aged 45 to 64, but their metropolitan/nonmetropolitan and central city/suburban moving patterns were very similar to this younger population. The major differences existed between older movers and those aged 20 to 44, especially with the population at the younger end of this age distribution. Compared with these younger population groups, older movers were less mobile, were more likely to relocate within their existing metropolitan areas or within their existing nonmetropolitan county, and were generally more likely to be attracted to nonmetropolitan and suburban places.

While metropolitan areas experienced net migration losses of persons over age 30, they experienced net gains of persons between the ages of 20 to 29. Central cities only experienced net migration gains of persons aged 20 to 24. These gains largely reflected the higher percentages of younger nonmetropolitan residents who moved to metropolitan areas. Generally, these net migration gains or losses had a greater impact (higher net migration rates) on the younger metropolitan and nonmetropolitan populations.

DISCUSSION

The residential moves made by the majority of today's older Americans suggest that their life-styles and personal resources are more congruent with urban than rural environments. Like Longino (1980, p. 209), who analyzed comparable 1965-1970 metro-nonmetro moving patterns, we conclude that the shifts

of older people ..."hardly [represent] a strong "current of migration" away from the great centers of commerce and industry."

Metropolitan areas' net migration losses of elderly people revealed more about the population structure and dynamics of large and small geographic areas than they did about the migration (stream) behavior of elderly people (Tucker, 1976; Wardwell, 1977). The sheer size of the older population in metropolitan areas will by itself guarantee a substantial number of movers to nonmetropolitan areas. While only 9.7% of the mobile metropolitan elderly or 2.3% of the total metropolitan elderly population (i.e., movers and nonmovers) actually moved to nonmetropolitan areas, this represented a metropolitan out-migration of 420,338 elderly persons. While gaining these new residents, nonmetropolitan areas lost only 313,403 outmigrants to metropolitan areas. Thus nonmetropolitan areas experienced population growth from these migration exchanges even though their outmigrants constituted 21% of their mobile elderly population or 4.2% of their total elderly population (i.e., movers and nonmovers). Assuming the same rate of elderly outmigration from nonmetropolitan areas, it can be shown that less than 7.2% of the mobile elderly metropolitan population would have had to relocate to nonmetropolitan areas for metropolitan areas to have achieved net migration gains of elderly people.

The net effects of these exchanges on the size of the elderly population in nonmetropolitan areas was small, but this may be a misleading finding. It is undoubtedly more significant to consider how the personal characteristics of a place's in-migrants (for example, their life-styles, health status, values, and personal resources) differ from those of its current elderly residents, if one is going to speculate on the impact that a new population has on a community's social and political fabric.

While the moves of most elderly persons did not suggest any strong attraction to rural living, their migration streams did reveal their strong

preferences for the lower density and less congestive living of the metropolitan suburbs. As a result, central cities lost a large number of elderly residents to the suburbs (Golant, 1979; Golant, Rudzitis & Daiches, 1978; Wiseman & Virden, 1977). This finding is significant because several researchers have expressed concern over whether the American suburbs have an adequate service infrastructure to meet the needs of their current aging residents. At issue then is whether these new waves of suburban elderly in-migrants will exacerbate further--especially in the future, as they age in place--this apparently growing gap between elderly service demands and suburban resources (Gutowski, 1981; Logan, 1984). Past research inquiries that have treated metropolitan areas as undifferentiated geographic destinations have consistently overlooked this important issue.

Three groups of elderly movers distinguished themselves because they favored central city over suburban locations as places to live. Their residential shifts deserve further scrutiny if only to better understand the reasons behind and success of their environmental adaptations.

One group substantially changed their living environments--they moved from a nonmetropolitan setting to the central city of a metropolitan area. Such a major change in living environment suggested that these moves were made in response to new individual demands for the social and medical services that are usually more available in high density urban cores.

A second group included older residents who had lived in central cities, and after moving opted to remain in their central city locations rather than to relocate to their metropolitan area's suburbs. Moves by this group would appear to be motivated less by the overall attributes of central city living than by the undesirable aspects of their dwellings or neighborhoods.

A third group of elderly persons who favored central cities had previously lived abroad. Central cities have traditionally provided a variety of social and

material advantages for recent ethnic populations, so that this was not an especially surprising finding. Nonetheless, we do not know a great deal about either the personal success of these moves or their impact on the already strained central city service supply. Nor have we carefully examined how the migration streams of these foreign in-migrants impact on the growth and decline of central city elderly populations.

Results showing that the moving patterns of the population over age 65 differed from those of the under 45 age group, but not from the 45 to 64 age group suggest that preferences for urban and rural living do not change dramatically from late middle age to old age. Such findings should be interpreted cautiously, however, until confirmed by longitudinal studies and by migration analyses that can distinguish the comparable moving adjustments of the over age 75 U.S. population.

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Table 1. Percentage of 1975 Metropolitan (SMSA) and Nonmetropolitan (NonSMSA) Populations That Moved Between 1975 and 1980, By Age

Age Group	1975 Residence: SMSA Total	SMSA Central City	SMSA Suburbs	NonSMSA	Total U.S. Movers %	Total U.S. Movers No. (in 000s)	Total U.S. Residents (in 000s)
5+	46.5	52.1	42.0	42.1	45.5	93,696	206,391
20 - 24	68.5	71.4	66.0	73.0	69.6	14,328	20,583
25 - 29	78.4	81.4	75.3	73.2	77.2	14,541	18,831
30 - 44	54.5	61.7	49.0	46.5	52.7	22,265	42,285
45 - 64	26.8	31.4	23.5	23.0	25.9	11,485	44,357
65+	23.6	26.5	21.1	20.2	22.6	5,816	25,691

Table 2. Destinations of Metropolitan (SMSA) Residents Who Moved Between 1975 and 1980, By Age (percentage distributions)

1975 Origin of Residence	1980 Destination Residence: Relocated Within Same SMSA	Relocated to Different SMSA	Relocated to NonSMSA	Total Movers: %	Total Movers: No. (in 000s)
Age 5+					
SMSA Total	65.1	25.8	9.2	100.0	72,043
Central City	66.9	25.1	8.0	100.0	35,574
Suburbs	63.2	26.5	10.3	100.0	36,469
Age 20-24					
SMSA Total	60.7	29.7	9.6	100.0	10,577
Central City	62.3	29.2	8.5	100.0	5,007
Suburbs	59.3	30.2	10.5	100.0	5,570
Age 25-29					
SMSA Total	64.0	27.7	8.3	100.0	11,310
Central City	62.8	29.2	8.0	100.0	5,999
Suburbs	65.4	26.0	8.7	100.0	5,312
Age 30-44					
SMSA Total	66.2	25.5	8.3	100.0	17,770
Central City	67.4	25.2	7.4	100.0	8,726
Suburbs	65.1	25.7	9.2	100.0	9,044
Age 45-64					
SMSA Total	67.2	22.9	10.0	100.0	9,015
Central City	71.6	20.3	8.1	100.0	4,399
Suburbs	62.9	25.3	11.7	100.0	4,616
Age 65+					
SMSA Total	66.9	23.4	9.7	100.0	4,323
Central City	70.1	21.7	8.1	100.0	2,290
Suburbs	63.2	25.3	11.6	100.0	2,032

Table 3. Destinations of Nonmetropolitan (NonSMSA) Residents Who Moved Between 1975 and 1980, By Age (percentage distributions)

Age Group	1980 Destination Residence: Relocated Within NonSMSA: Total	Same County	Different County	Relocated to SMSA	Total Movers: %	No. (in 000s)
Age 5+	74.0	54.1	19.9	26.0	100.0	21,653
Age 20-24	66.8	46.1	20.6	33.2	100.0	3,751
Age 25-29	70.0	50.5	19.6	30.0	100.0	3,230
Age 30-44	75.2	55.7	19.5	24.8	100.0	4,496
Age 45-64	78.8	59.7	19.1	21.2	100.0	2,470
Age 65+	79.0	60.5	18.4	21.0	100.0	1,493

Table 4. Central City, Suburban, and Nonmetropolitan Net Migration Patterns, 1975-1980.

	1975-80 Net Migration Gains or Losses			
	SMSAs	Central Cities	Suburbs	NonSMSAs
		Age 5+		
U.S. Net Migration Gain or Loss	-996,072 (0.6)	-6,976,327 (10.2)	5,980,255 (6.9)	996,072 (1.9)
U.S. In-migration from Abroad	3,532,071 (2.3)	1,886,626 (2.8)	1,645,445 (1.9)	399,765 (0.7)
Adjusted Net Migration Gain or Loss	2,535,999 (1.6)	-5,089,701 (7.5)	5,980,255 (8.8)	1,395,837 (2.7)
		Age 20-24		
U.S. Net Migration Gain or Loss	235,691 (1.5)	12,535 (0.2)	223,156 (2.6)	-235,691 (4.6)
U.S. In-migration from Abroad	560,047 (3.6)	331,340 (4.7)	228,707 (2.7)	65,459 (1.3)
Adjusted Net Migration Gain or Loss	795,738 (5.2)	343,875 (4.9)	451,863 (5.4)	-170,232 (3.3)
		Age 25-29		
U.S. Net Migration Gain or Loss	27,749 (0.2)	-1,195,235 (16.2)	1,222,984 (17.3)	-27,749 (0.6)
U.S. In-migration from Abroad	607,536 (4.2)	341,996 (4.6)	265,540 (3.8)	78,032 (1.8)
Adjusted Net Migration Gain or Loss	635,285 (4.4)	-853,239 (11.6)	1,488,524 (21.1)	50,283 (1.1)
		Age 30-44		
U.S. Net Migration Gain or Loss	-362,573 (1.1)	-2,273,806 (16.1)	1,911,233 (10.3)	362,573 (3.8)
U.S. In-migration from Abroad	889,162 (2.7)	448,031 (3.2)	441,131 (2.4)	100,488 (1.0)
Adjusted Net Migration Gain or Loss	526,589 (1.6)	-1,825,775 (12.9)	2,352,364 (12.7)	463,061 (4.8)
		Age 45-64		
U.S. Net Migration Gain or Loss	-374,535 (0.1)	-1,020,754 (7.3)	646,219 (3.3)	374,535 (3.5)
U.S. In-migration from Abroad	360,398 (0.1)	188,603 (1.4)	171,795 (0.9)	30,395 (0.3)
Adjusted Net Migration Gain or Loss	-14,137 (0.04)	-832,151 (5.9)	814,014 (4.2)	404,930 (3.8)
		Age 65 +		
U.S. Net Migration Gain or Loss	-106,935 (0.6)	-558,183 (6.4)	451,248 (4.7)	106,935 (1.4)
U.S. In-migration from Abroad	102,566 (0.6)	55,693 (0.6)	46,873 (0.5)	6,824 (0.1)
Adjusted Net Migration Gain or Loss	-4,369 (0.02)	-502,490 (5.8)	498,121 (5.2)	113,759 (1.5)

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are net migration rates (per 100 persons) using 1975 populations as base.

"Adjusted" net migration gains or losses reflect the flow of persons to U.S. from abroad.

Table 5. City-Suburban Destinations of Movers Relocating Within SMSAs, From Different SMSAs, From NonSMSAs and From Abroad Between 1975 and 1980, By Age (percentage distributions)

1975 Origin of Residence	Age Groups 5+	20-24	25-29	30-44	45-64	65+
From Within Same SMSA						
Within Central City	35.4	35.5	35.6	33.3	37.0	40.5
From Central City to Suburbs	15.4	13.1	16.5	16.7	15.0	15.2
Within Suburbs	43.2	42.6	41.3	44.7	42.6	39.0
From Suburbs to Central City	5.9	8.8	6.6	5.3	5.4	5.4
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number (in 000s)	46,870	6,423	7,234	11,767	6,054	2,891
From Different SMSA						
To Central Cities	37.5	49.3	42.6	33.6	30.7	29.5
To Suburbs	62.5	50.7	57.4	66.4	69.3	70.5
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number (in 000s)	18,555	3,143	3,135	4,527	2,063	1,011
From Central City of Different SMSA						
To Central Cities	42.6	52.0	46.7	39.7	36.8	33.3
To Suburbs	57.4	48.0	53.3	60.3	63.2	66.7
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number (in 000s)	8,900	1,461	1,754	2,203	894	498
From Suburbs of Different SMSA						
To Central Cities	32.9	47.0	37.5	27.8	26.0	25.8
To Suburbs	67.1	53.0	62.5	72.2	74.0	74.2
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number (in 000s)	9,655	1,682	1,381	2,324	1,169	513
From NonSMSA						
To Central Cities	40.1	50.2	42.6	34.5	33.7	34.5
To Suburbs	59.9	49.8	57.4	65.6	66.3	65.5
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number (in 000s)	5,622	1,247	968	1,113	523	313
From Abroad						
To Central Cities	53.4	59.2	56.3	50.4	52.3	54.3
To Suburbs	46.6	40.8	43.7	49.6	47.7	45.7
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number (in 000s)	3,532	560	608	889	360	103